

Problem Gambling

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Missouri continued to be an innovative influence in problem gambling efforts during the past year through the additions and enhancements of the programs and services provided throughout the state. Significant strides were made toward researching the effectiveness of the Voluntary Exclusion Program, the underage prevention programs were strengthened, treatment services were augmented with additional providers and the speakers' bureau and traveling educational exhibits were well-utilized throughout the year.

Over 80 percent of Americans participate in some form of gambling.¹ For most people, gambling is an occasional recreational activity in which they participate responsibly. However, a small percentage of the population experiences problems from their gambling behavior. For some, these problems are due to a lack of awareness regarding responsible gambling practices. Their problematic gambling can be halted once they receive adequate outreach regarding the guidelines for gambling responsibly, as well as information about the risk factors and warning signs of compulsive gambling.

For others, the destructive gambling activity is due to a progressive disorder characterized by continued participation in gambling activities despite the increasing adverse consequences. Neurobiological research has indicated that, as with alcoholism and other substance addictions, there are biological components to the disorder. Recognized by the American Psychiatric Association, pathological gambling (also referred to as compulsive gambling) is both diagnosable and treatable.

Missouri's Approach

Missouri Alliance to Curb Problem Gambling – The growing success of Missouri's public awareness program is largely due to the efforts of the Missouri Alliance to Curb Problem Gambling (Alliance), of which the Missouri Gaming Commission is an active member. Formed in 1997, the Alliance brings together diverse groups with a common interest of working on issues relating to problem gambling.² Dedicated to increasing prevention of underage gambling and awareness among all age groups regarding the guidelines to responsibly participate in gambling activities, how to recognize problem gambling and the resources available for those impacted by a gambling problem, the Alliance plays a key role in Missouri's comprehensive program to attack problem gambling.

Other states and countries have emulated various components of Missouri's broad-based approach to problem gambling prevention, outreach and treatment. Indeed, the "Beat Addiction – Choose the Right Path" video, developed by the Alliance as part of a middle school prevention program, received the Award of Excellence from the Communicator Awards international competition this past year.³

Education & Outreach Efforts

Responsible Gaming Education Month (RGEM) – Governor Holden, on June 30, 2003, officially proclaimed August 2003 Missouri Responsible Gaming Education Month.⁴

RGEM 2003 events included a public forum in Kansas City on problem gambling and the family; an

¹ Source: Final Report of the National Gambling Impact Study Commission (1999).

² The Alliance consists of both governing members and participating members. Governing members share the responsibility of administering the Alliance programs and include: the Missouri Council on Problem Gambling Concerns, Inc. (non-profit advocacy group for problem gamblers); the Missouri Department of Mental Health; the Missouri Gaming Commission; the Missouri Lottery; the Missouri Riverboat Gaming Association (private trade organization representing riverboat casino operators); and the Port Authority of Kansas City.



³ The Award of Excellence is the highest award presented by The Communicator Awards competition, which was founded by communication professionals to recognize excellence in the communication field. The video, facilitator's guide and video script were created with input from students, teachers, school counselors, Alliance members and the Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education.

⁴ To our knowledge, Missouri is the first state to set aside one month to highlight awareness activities promoting problem gambling outreach and education. In 1999, Missouri was also the first state in the country to set aside a week to promote responsible gaming and to educate its residents about the programs available to help problem gamblers.

educational exhibit at the 2003 Missouri Black Expo; an exhibit, focus group and educational track on underage gambling prevention at the 2003 Turning Resources and Energy in New Direction (TREND) conference; an exhibit at the fall training for prosecuting attorneys; and a special presentation on co-occurring disorders by Joanna Franklin.⁵ She also provided two counselor training sessions as part of RGEM. RGEM also featured training sessions for gaming employees, educational displays for employees and visitors, an intensive advertising campaign to heighten public awareness about problem gambling and the distribution of educational resources.

Speakers Bureau and Traveling Educational Exhibits – Speakers are available to give presentations for groups and organizations throughout the state. The presentations are tailored to the needs of the group/organization; they can be a broad overview of problem gambling issues, or focus on a specific topic. Topics include, but are not limited to:

- Problem gambling 101 – misconceptions, prevalence rates, risk factors and warning signs;
- Guideline for responsible gambling;
- Underage gambling issues and prevention; and
- Special populations.

All presentations are free-of-charge and include information about the resources – including free treatment – available in Missouri for residents with a gambling problem and their families.⁶

Missouri's Voluntary Exclusion Program

Approximately 900 individuals elected to join the voluntary exclusion program during the first seven months of 2003. In August 2003, more than 5,800 individuals were in the program. Missouri's voluntary exclusion program for problem gamblers was created in 1996 in response to a citizen's request to be banned from the riverboat gambling boats because he found himself unable to control his gambling.⁷ During development of the program, treatment professionals indicated it is essential for problem gamblers to both acknowledge they have a problem and to take personal responsibility for the problem if they are to achieve long-term recovery. The Commission revised the rule and initiated the program consistent with their advice.

Under the provisions of the program, the problem gambler agrees to accept the responsibility of staying out of the excursion gambling boats, that it is not the responsibility of the boats nor the Commission to prevent them from entering the gambling boat, and that if they choose to violate the program and are discovered, they will be arrested for trespassing. Under this program, the Commission requires all licensees to:

- Remove persons in the program from their direct marketing lists;
- Deny people in the program check cashing privileges and participation in player's clubs; and
- Consult the list of people in the program before paying out any jackpot of \$1,200 or more.⁸

⁵ Franklin is the vice president for the Institute on Problem Gambling, serves on the Board of Directors for the National Council on Problem Gambling and is the director of Network Development and Training for Trimeridian in Indianapolis, Indiana.

⁶ For more information or to arrange a presentation, please contact the Gaming Commission.

⁷ The program is formally called the List of Disassociated Persons. The provisions of the program can be found at 11 CSR 45-17 et. seq.

⁸ Internal Revenue Service form W2-G is required for any jackpot of \$1,200 or more. Because this form requires the patron's social security number, the List of Disassociated Persons can be efficiently referenced.

There is no procedure for removal once a person is placed on the List of Disassociated Persons. Those who treat problem gamblers are nearly unanimous in their belief that problem gambling is a lifetime condition and that a person is never cured but continues to work at their recovery day by day – just as an individual with diabetes is never cured, but can control the disorder by vigilant attention daily to the foods selected for consumption and abstinence.

The voluntary exclusion program is not for everyone, nor is it a quick fix for problem gamblers. The vast majority of people who suffer from problem gambling will need counseling or group therapy such as Gamblers Anonymous (GA).

Research – The Commission received an appropriation of \$25,000 during FY 2003 to use toward research to evaluate the efficacy of the voluntary exclusion program. The Commission entered into a memorandum of understanding with the Port Authority of Kansas City to maximize the utility of funds and resources of both agencies. The joint request for proposals for problem gambling programs and research was released in April 2003. The proposals were reviewed during the summer and the awardees were announced on August 13, 2003.⁹ Harvard Medical School was selected to conduct the research that is scheduled to commence Fall 2003. The Port Authority of Kansas City also awarded two grants for youth outreach programs that will allow the Kansas City area to benefit from outreach programs that are age-specific for youth in grades kindergarten through college. The outreach programs are to begin this academic year.

⁹ The awardees were Harvard Medical School, Tri County Medical Health Services and University of Missouri: Wellness Resource Center.

Other Resources for Problem Gamblers and Their Loved Ones

1-888-BETSOFF Problem Gambling Help Line – The efforts of the Alliance to promote 1-888-BETSOFF, Missouri's 24-hour problem gambling help line, have facilitated increased awareness and utilization of the help line. During 2002, the help line received 2,900 calls from individuals seeking problem gambling information and assistance. Individuals calling the help line can receive referrals to certified compulsive gambling counselors, GA, Gam-Anon and consumer credit counselors, as well as information about the voluntary exclusion program and other Missouri resources.

Free Compulsive Gambling Treatment Services – Missouri provides free compulsive gambling treatment services for Missouri residents suffering from problem gambling. These services are open to both the problem gambler and family members; family members can access the services even if the problem gambler does not. Indeed, this can be a valuable tool for loved ones to find the guidance they need to help the problem gambler recognize and accept the problem with gambling. The Department of Mental Health administers this program using a network of private mental health providers who have been certified as compulsive gambling counselors.

Online Resources – Visitors to the Commission's website <http://www.mgc.dps.mo.gov> can access information about the voluntary exclusion program, including the history of the program, frequently asked questions, information on how to place one's self on the List of Disassociated Persons and a sample application for placement on the list. Visitors can also access links to other on-line resources, including on-line support

groups such as GA and Gam-Anon and the official website of the Missouri Alliance to Curb Problem Gambling <http://www.888BETSOFF.com>. The Alliance website provides information about services for problem gamblers, education and awareness material and research about problem gambling issues.

Casino Self-Exclusion Programs – Some problem gamblers choose not to use the list, yet would like to utilize some external method of limiting their access to gambling activity. Many of Missouri’s casinos provide such alternative tools for problem gamblers, which may include temporary or permanent suspension of playing privileges, voluntary suspension of check-cashing privileges, self-transaction exclusion programs and removal from direct marketing lists.¹⁰

Problem Gambling Advocates – The Commission employs a full-time problem gambling program administrator to act on behalf of problem gamblers, their families and friends. Due to the sustained growth of the voluntary exclusion program and increased demands, approval was given during the 91st legislative session to provide one FTE to provide clerical support for the program administrator. The assistant assumed her new duties in November 2002. The advocates assist problem gamblers and their families in locating treatment and other resources; oversee the voluntary exclusion program; train Commission staff and agents; coordinate problem gambling research efforts; conduct public education and outreach efforts; develop collateral materials for education and prevention efforts and assemble information on problem gambling resources.¹¹

Underage Gambling Prevention

Problem gambling is not restricted to adults. According to the National Gambling Impact Study Commission (NGISC), the number of youth at-risk of becoming problem gamblers is more than double that of adults. It also reported approximately 85 percent of youth (ages 18-20) have gambled at some point in their life, and NCPG reports 77 percent of youth ages 12-17 and 72 percent of youth under 12 years of age, report gambling once a week or more.

Contrary to popular opinion, proximity to an excursion gambling boat is irrelevant to underage gambling activity. The most popular forms of gambling for youth are those to which they have easy access (at home, school, etc.) such as sports betting, card games and personal skill activities, with interest in Internet gambling on the rise. The Alliance continues to expand its underage gambling prevention program that includes the speakers’ bureau, traveling educational exhibit, posters and brochures, fact sheets, participation in education conferences and an in-school addictions awareness program targeting grades 6-9. This program addresses the commonalities and differences of addictions in general, with an emphasis on gambling.¹² In FY 2003, this program was enhanced to include an assembly format, which allows the Alliance to reach a greater number of students with a more effective cost per student. In January 2003, the Alliance began distributing the new “Beat Addiction – Choose the Right Path” video kit with a companion facilitator’s guide.¹³

¹⁰ Individuals should contact the respective property for more information about the programs offered.

¹¹ To our knowledge, Missouri is the only state in the nation whose regulatory agency staffs full-time problem gambling advocates.

¹² For more information about “All Bets Off”, contact the Missouri Gaming Commission.

¹³ The video kit is distributed free of charge to schools with students in grades 6-9. From January to May 2003, more than 385 video kits have been requested and distributed, effectively reaching more than 210,000 secondary-level students in grades 6-12, or about 45 percent of Missouri’s secondary enrollment. This video kit has also gained attention internationally, with requests for copies coming from a variety of states as well as Canada, England and New Zealand.